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SUBJECT: CONSUL GENERAL'S INITIAL MEETING WITH LIU YUNGENG, CHAIR OF
THE SHANGHAI MUNICIPAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS

REF: SHANGHAI 328

CLASSIFIED BY: Beatrice A. Camp, Consul General, U.S. Consulate
General, Shanghai, China, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an October 24 meeting with the Consul General, Shanghai Municipal People's Congress (MPC) Chair Liu Yungeng discussed the MPC's efforts to improve transparency in its legislative process. Liu said ordinary citizens can observe some MPC meetings and voice concerns directly through a special MPC office. He highlighted recent cases in which the Shanghai Government addressed public concerns about social security and resettlement issues. End summary.

¶2. (U) On October 24, Consul General Camp paid a courtesy call on MPC Chairman Liu Yungeng. Liu was accompanied by Yao Mingbao, Secretary General of the SMPC Standing Committee, Xu Yi, Deputy Director of MPC General Office, and several officials from the Shanghai Foreign Affairs Office.

MPC Responsibilities

¶3. (U) Liu explained that there are 860 delegates in the Shanghai Municipal People's Congress (MPC), of which 65 are Standing Committee members. The MPC has three responsibilities: passing legislation, supervising government bodies, and nominating/dismissing government officials. The 860 delegates are drawn from different professions, social and ethnic groups, and help the government better understand Shanghai citizens' concerns, said Liu.

Standing Committee Meeting

¶4. (U) According to Liu, the MPC Standing Committee meets every two months to draft laws and enact personnel changes. It held its most recent meeting October 21-23, in which laws on compulsory education and promotion of e-commerce were reviewed. At that session, Shanghai High Court President Ying Yong also reported on a new administrative procedure law, in which ordinary citizens would have the right to sue the local government.

Efforts at Democracy, Transparency

¶5. (U) Liu talked about the MPC's efforts to improve its democratic procedures. Voting is now carried out through an

"anonymous electronic voting system." At Plenary Sessions (the next one to be held in early 2009), the 860 delegates can put forward legislative proposals individually or in groups. All joint proposals supported by at least ten delegates receive "legally binding status", meaning the government "needs to consider them seriously." The MPC also invites ordinary citizens to observe meetings and even provides online video broadcasts of some meetings.

Shanghai Government Listening to its People

¶16. (C) The CG asked how ordinary citizens can bring issues of concern directly to the MPC's attention. Liu responded that the MPC has an office that receives and handles letters from citizens. He personally reads many of these letters himself. The MPC makes recommendations to the Shanghai Municipal Government for the handling of common public-interest issues. Liu gave, as examples, concerns about Shanghai's aging population and the welfare of elderly citizens, especially migrants who have little to no social security. Liu said the Shanghai Government passed legislation to provide living allowances and subsidies for elderly citizens over the age of 70, and that the government will implement more social benefits like this in the future. But he also acknowledged that "not all problems can be solved quickly." As an example, he talked about the urban construction resettlement issue and residents' demands for "high resettlement fees" from the government, which, according to Liu, cannot afford to pay such exorbitant fees. When asked by the CG whether the MPC had addressed citizen concerns about the recent contaminated milk scandal, Liu blandly asserted that the government's initiatives were widely covered by the media, and offered to provide the CG with media reports on the issue.

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Comment

¶17. (C) Liu has held his position less than a year, but appeared at ease discussing the MPC's role and work, and did not rely on notes or his aides. Although he evaded the CG's question about the recent milk scandal, he was frank in discussing other social issues currently facing the local government and tried to emphasize the government's efforts to improve its transparency. Despite an opening to do so, Liu did not discuss the ongoing reorganization of the Shanghai Government. Liu does not appear to speak English, though he stated he recently read a book about the U.S. Congress and noted "there is room for improvement" in the U.S. legislative process as well.

CAMP